

# A future in pharmacy

Here's what you  
need to know.

**ROYAL  
PHARMACEUTICAL  
SOCIETY**



## What does a pharmacist do?

Pharmacy is the third largest healthcare profession in Great Britain. You'll find pharmacists wherever there are medicines: supplying them, providing advice about them, developing new ones, and offering health services. They're part of the wider healthcare team, ensuring that patients receive the best possible care.

As a pharmacist, you'll need to be an expert in medicines and their use, with a unique set of skills and knowledge. You'll train as a scientist and clinician, then use your scientific know-how advising patients on their medicines and making recommendations on the best medicine for particular conditions and diseases.

Some pharmacists also prescribe medicines on prescriptions, just like doctors. Some work in other roles, with less direct contact with patients, for example in universities, in regulation, or in government organisations, research, publishing and in the pharmaceutical industry.

Pharmacists often work in busy environments, so being organised, logical, able to manage multiple tasks, and remain calm under pressure is essential.

You must have a good eye for detail and be thorough and accurate. You'll also need very good communication skills to explain technical medicines information to patients. You'll be part of a team and often involved in education and training others, so good people skills are also essential.

## Where can pharmacy take me?

Anywhere!

Pharmacists are valued health professionals, with skills that are in demand worldwide. After completing five years of study and training you'll find doors open to you in so many different areas, offering a career with security, flexibility, variety, opportunity, satisfaction and excellent rewards. As a pharmacist your role will be constantly evolving, as new roles emerge all the time across healthcare. Many of the experiences and skills you'll develop in practice can be transferred to other pharmacy environments and roles.

## Does it pay well?

As a registered pharmacist you can probably expect a starting salary of around £20k–£30k depending on the area of pharmacy and location you chose to work in. Within a decade you might be earning anywhere between £35k–£60k – possibly more in some senior positions!

**More information can be found on the following websites:**

### **Hospital pharmacy**

NHS Careers: [www.healthcareers.nhs.uk](http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk)

### **Industrial pharmacy**

Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry: [www.abpi.org.uk](http://www.abpi.org.uk)

### **Community pharmacy**

PJ Careers: [jobs.pharmaceutical-journal.com](http://jobs.pharmaceutical-journal.com)

An illustration of a person with dark skin and short dark hair, wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and pink trousers, climbing an orange ladder. The background is a bright yellow with stylized white clouds. The ladder is positioned diagonally from the bottom left towards the top right.

# Qualifications

To qualify as a pharmacist you must take a four-year Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) degree course followed by successful completion of a year of preregistration training within a pharmacy workplace (for which you get paid). At the end of preregistration training, you must pass the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) registration assessment after which you will be able to register and practise as a pharmacist.

## England, Wales & Northern Ireland

Although most courses are geared to those with A-levels (Highers in Scotland) in chemistry and two of biology/mathematics/physics, students may also be considered with chemistry and one of biology/mathematics/physics (and one other subject). You need basic literacy and numeracy skills (e.g. GCSE in English language and mathematics).

## Scotland

In Scotland, students require Highers in chemistry and English plus two of either mathematics, physics or biology.

## Other qualifications

A lot of students admitted to schools of pharmacy have other qualifications. These include the Irish School Leaving Certificate, National or Higher National Certificates or Diplomas, International Baccalaureate or Access qualifications.

You can find details on UK Schools of Pharmacy at [www.rpharms.com/careers](http://www.rpharms.com/careers).

All GB MPharm degrees are accredited by the GPhC. Please remember it is vital that you check the precise entry requirements of your chosen school of pharmacy.

If you're wondering what courses or options to take at school, sixth form or college, and are thinking of studying pharmacy at university you'll find the information in this leaflet useful to help you plan and decide your next steps.

## CASE STUDY

# Pharmacists working in community pharmacy

Community pharmacists work at the front line of healthcare in cities, towns and villages across Great Britain. They work from their own pharmacies or out of local healthcare centres and doctor's surgeries.

As a community pharmacist your job would be all about helping patients and the public, assessing their conditions and making decisions about which medicines they should take. You'll be involved in dispensing medicines and offering your patients advice and practical help on keeping healthy. It is a very responsible job and community pharmacists tend to be highly respected members of their communities.

**Community pharmacists are also taking on more of the roles that have traditionally been undertaken by doctors, such as the management and monitoring of long term conditions, for example asthma and diabetes, as well as delivering flu vaccinations, and conducting medicines reviews.** They also help people give up smoking, alter their diets to make them healthier and advise on sexual health matters. Some community pharmacists own their own businesses and enjoy the challenges of management and having responsibility for staff, stock and premises that this brings. Others work for large pharmacy chains and have the opportunity to move around and/or progress onto more senior roles within an established company structure.

## Janice Perkins

Pharmacy Superintendent  
at Well

Over my 17 year career with Boots opportunities arose to try different roles including Pharmacy Manager, Branch Manager, District Manager and Professional Development Manager. One of the great things about pharmacy is the wide range of roles you can undertake all which support patient care in slightly different ways. Starting as a community pharmacist working in a branch provided a great foundation for my future career choices and whatever role I've had I've made sure the patient/customer is at the centre of my decision making process.

I joined the Co-operative Pharmacy (now Well) in 2000 as a Business Development Manager and four years later I became Pharmacy Superintendent.

Being a Pharmacy Superintendent is a challenging but rewarding role. I have the opportunity to influence within the business and as the 3rd largest multiple and employer of over 1000 pharmacists I'm asked to contribute to discussions on a number of topics.

# Pharmacists working in hospital pharmacy

Hospital pharmacists are a vital part of the healthcare team. Working in either the NHS or private hospitals, being a hospital pharmacist means you're part of a team where the focus is firmly on patients.

There is a lot of variety in hospital pharmacy in terms of what you can do and you will always be working within a team of pharmacy staff which include pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and pharmacy assistants. You might get involved in manufacturing, developing, testing, supplying and monitoring the effectiveness of all of the medicines used in the hospital.

You will also provide advice to other healthcare professionals and not just patients, you may evaluate medicines and develop protocols. You may then specialise later in your career in conditions such as mental health, cancer (oncology) and the heart (cardiology); and specialist areas of practice, such as paediatrics (child health), and the care of older people. Pharmacists also work in urgent and emergency medicine departments, quality assurance, clinical trials, and in medicines information departments. You will have opportunities to progress into management or teaching roles within the hospital and work closer with the wider healthcare team.

## Lucy Galloway

Clinical Pharmacist In Hospital  
Specialising In Renal Transplant & Urology

Every day I apply my expert knowledge to advise on dose adjustments for medicines in renal (kidney) impairment, pharmacokinetic interactions, drug administration and management of adverse drug reactions (side effects). In renal and transplantation the drug regimens are highly complex and a failure to manage them correctly could have catastrophic consequences, so the pharmacist is an important and respected member of the multidisciplinary team.

I am also an independent prescriber and run a medication review clinic for transplant patients. Being able to suggest changes to make it easier for patients to manage their condition is very rewarding.

Other roles that I have include writing guidelines, financial management of drug budgets and teaching and training undergraduates and junior pharmacists.

# Pharmacists working in industrial pharmacy

**Industrial Pharmacists are mainly involved in the research, design, development and testing of new medicines and treatments, ensuring their safety and quality.**

Want to be part of a team responsible for creating and marketing a medicine that helps millions of people all over the world? Industrial pharmacists work in companies that essentially make medicines. However they are involved in different stages of this process, from initial design to public launch and sales.

You will be using the latest technologies, processes and methods to develop new medicines for patients. Although many pharmacists start off their careers in industry in a laboratory based role, the areas that pharmacists work in include many non-lab roles. For example in Medicines Information, Regulatory Affairs, Marketing and Business Development. Industrial pharmacy can be an extremely rewarding career path and can lead to managerial positions or other positions that are not traditionally associated with pharmacy within the same company. A role which involves many different skills is that of a Qualified Person (QP). Here you are responsible for releasing product for supply to the market and confirming that it has been made and tested to the required quality standards in line with the regulated methods and processes. Roles in Quality Assurance can involve overseas travel to locations in your own company and to the sites of suppliers.

## Monica Sudra

Scientific Advisor,  
Glaxosmithkline

Graduating from pharmacy, I undertook a split pre-registration training programme with the NHS and the pharmaceutical industry in product research and development. I was involved in drug formulation and it was exciting and rewarding to work as part of a multidisciplinary team of chemists, statisticians and other pharmacists. I also began to see the variety of career paths pharmacists were well placed to peruse within the industry – such as manufacturing, drug development, commercial sales and marketing roles and regulatory affairs to name a few.

I wanted a career that would allow me to benefit patients, provide me with diversity in my role and enable me to apply my skills and knowledge to further challenge and develop myself. Since qualifying as a pharmacist, I became a Senior Clinical Safety Scientist in pharmacovigilance with in the industry, which gave me a great insight into this important field of industry. Progressing from this role, I am now a Scientific Advisor in the vaccines medical affairs division. It is immensely rewarding to work towards continually improving public health, whilst also bringing value to the business.

# Pharmacists working in academia

**Whether it's teaching, researching, practicing or a mix of all three, academic pharmacists enjoy exciting careers in universities, research institutes and other organisations throughout the world.**

Academic pharmacists educate, train, assess and develop pharmacy students, pre-registration trainees, pharmacists and other healthcare professionals. You will use and apply your pharmacy knowledge and expertise to teach the next generation of pharmacists and others through a variety of teaching methods. Working alongside the wider educational team, you will update the degree programme and develop learning material to reflect changes in education and practice. Academics also offer general support to students and are often viewed as role models and mentors.

Teacher practitioners have a split role, spending on average around 60% of their time working in hospital, community or industrial pharmacy and 40% of the time as a lecturer.

Academic pharmacists are also thought of as researchers, as the role usually involves conducting some form of research, e.g. in a science based area of practice, drug design or pharmacy services. You will collect evidence, analyse it and use this data to make improvements to medicines and patient's health.

**Mahendra Patel**

Academic

Being an academic pharmacist has given me the fantastic opportunity of engaging at the very forefront of science, technology and practice sparing little chance for boredom to set in – without doubt it is a career that is rich in variety and individuality, offering stimulation and excitement throughout with uncompromising personal satisfaction and pride.

Academic pharmacists not only have highly regarded customary roles as lecturers and professors, some may decide to pursue senior management positions within the university and become heads of departments and schools. Others may choose to act as consultants and senior advisors for local, regional, national, and international organisations and institutions, as well as governmental bodies. Often they are at the cutting edge of the profession and are instrumental in influencing pharmacy development, policy, and practice. Their depth and breadth of knowledge in terms of teaching, research and health care service and utilisation can lead to various opportunities within science as well as professional practice.

# Pharmacists working in the military

**Military pharmacists work in the Army, Navy and Airforce. Some of them are also service personnel and undertake additional required military training.**

You may be located on the base operating from a pharmacy or be on service with your colleagues around the UK and abroad. You are responsible for ensuring that medicines reach service personnel.

It can be particularly challenging as you will work in highly pressured environments where access to medicines and transportation may be limited.

You will also provide services to ex-service personnel, who may have long term conditions resulting from active service.

**Ellie Williams**

Military Pharmacist

I was lucky enough to be able to combine two ambitions: becoming a pharmacist and joining the Armed Forces. Having qualified in 1989 I joined the Regular Army in 1997. As I already had NHS hospital experience under my belt I was sent to a Medical Logistics role for my first posting; within six months I was deployed to Bosnia. Personally, it is the deployments that I enjoy most; they provide interesting professional challenges, leadership opportunities and the chance to travel to countries you normally only read about! Over my career I have deployed to many countries including Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Iraq and Afghanistan. To deliver a pharmacy service, sometimes many miles from UK, often as the only pharmacist in the region, there are a number of helpful traits to have. A sense of professionalism is essential. Other useful skills are: adaptability to unusual circumstances; confident decision-making; and innovative/unconventional problem-solving. Army pharmacists need to be robust enough to deploy in field conditions; this requires both mental and physical resilience. And, importantly, you need to be a team player both in the UK and on deployments.



## Pharmacists working in care homes

Care home pharmacists provide services to nursing or residential homes for patients who are not able to care for themselves, for example older people with complex medical conditions.

There is a lot of person-centred care in care homes. You build relationships with patients who have complex conditions that have to be managed strictly, many older patients have 'polypharmacy' needs, where they're on many different medications for many reasons, so you have to balance all of those drugs and how they react with each other while still maintaining quality of life for these people.

You will also be involved in managing medicines stock and medicines waste, drawing up protocols so that systems run smoothly. Like many other pharmacists you will work in a team and will train others, e.g. care home staff.

Wasim Baqir

Care Home Pharmacist

Care home pharmacists can work in a number of settings (e.g. hospitals, GP practices, primary care teams) and work closely with other pharmacy services as well as other health and social care professionals (e.g. GPs, consultants, nurses, social workers) to care home residents get the best from their medicines.

We often work autonomously (sometimes as independent prescribers), dealing with older people with complex medical conditions and medication regimens. I am responsible for identifying patients at risk of medicines related harm and working with them and their families, ensure that they are prescribed only the medicines that bring them value in terms of health and wellbeing. We also work with pharmacy technicians colleagues to ensure that medicines systems (e.g. ordering, training care home staff, administration) are safe so that patients are administered the correct medicine at the right time and medicines waste is minimised.

This is a role for pharmacists who like working with patients in multidisciplinary teams.

# Pharmacists working in urgent and emergency care

The Urgent and Emergency Care (U&E) setting encompasses hospital Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments, walk-in centres, non-emergency services, such as NHS 111, NHS 24, and Out of Hours (OOH) providers.

Pharmacists working in U&E support patients with medicines related issues and common ailments when GP surgeries and other healthcare services are unavailable.

You will provide patients with access to medicines in emergency situations, treat minor injuries, obtain information from patients about medicines they take (a medicine history), and provide advice to other healthcare professionals.

Victoria Bray

Clinical Lead for Emergency Medicine

I am Clinical Lead for Acute and Emergency Medicine and spend part of my working week as an independent clinician, assessing, diagnosing, treating and admitting or discharging emergency medicine patients.

After passing my registration assessment, I undertook a 3 year postgraduate diploma followed by a 6 month independent prescribing course and postgraduate advanced assessment skills course. I worked as a resident pharmacist for 12 months before moving into a senior pharmacist post for 6 months. I then moved to a specialist post in Acute Medicine for 18 months. I took a role to set up the delivery of specialist hospital care in a primary care setting, alongside a focus on medication safety for 6 months, went on to lead for emergency medicine for 2 years and finally clinical lead for Acute and Emergency Medicine. I want to highlight that a broad experience in clinical, operational and governance roles, without specialising at day 1, has allowed a successful route into emergency medicine. It's possible, it's achievable – if you want to do it!

## CASE STUDY

# Pharmacists working in GP practices

**An emerging model of care delivery involves utilising the skills of pharmacist in GP practices.**

Pharmacists working as part of the team in general practice can make a huge difference to both patients and clinical colleagues. You will consult with and treat patients directly, working closely with GPs to resolve medicines issues, and enabling them to focus their skills where they are most needed, for example on diagnosing and treating patients. You will therefore usually be an independent prescriber.

You will review patients' medicines and provide advice on how best to take them. As part of the multidisciplinary team, pharmacists are able to advise other professionals about medicines, resolve problems with prescriptions and reduce prescribing errors.

Helen Kilminster

GP Pharmacist

Hello! My name is Helen Kilminster and I am a pharmacist working in General Practice. Also I am an independent prescriber and in my final stages of my MSc. Advance Clinical Practice. My days are busy and hectic but I love my job. I am able to apply evidence based medicine and deliver personalised holistic patient care. I see patients at the surgery, in their homes and at care homes. With my knowledge of medicines and clinical skill I am able to evaluate the situation, assess the patient and consequently provide the necessary next steps. My job is hugely rewarding and I have been fortunate to experience working with other allied healthcare professionals to ensure excellent patient care and patient safety.

I see a variety of clinical presentations and manage various long-term medical conditions in a diverse patient population. Sometimes my job role involves not being patient facing. This means I am able to get involved in analysing data and project planning. It is important to understand what matters to the population you look after, which is something I feel fortunate to be involved in. I started working in General Practice after coming from a hospital training year and then community pharmacy background. It was an unscripted opportunity and I believe pharmacy can bring a different dimension to the surgery team. There are huge opportunities for all pharmacists regardless of experience to work in General Practice. Always worth remembering how unique we all are and understand through our passion and sense of purpose we can be future leaders of healthcare in our communities.

## Veterinary pharmacy

Animals have similar needs to humans, they also get sick and/or suffer from diseases. However, their physiology and anatomy can be very different. Veterinary pharmacists specialise in medicines for the treatment of animals. You will be involved in the manufacture, supply and distribution of medicines, and work closely with veterinary surgeons and their teams. You may be involved in the treatment of pets, small animals, large groups of animals, e.g. on a farm, livestock (animals reared for food), and more exotic species.



## Pharmacists working in regulatory affairs

Regulatory affairs departments are found in pharmaceutical companies and government bodies, and you will be based in an office-type environment. Pharmacists who work in this sector have a comprehensive understanding of the law and regulation that relates to the manufacture and supply of medicines. You may not have much contact with patients, however the projects and activities you deliver will impact patients, as well as pharmacists and other healthcare professionals.



# Portfolio careers

A portfolio career is the term used for careers which straddle several sectors of the profession. As a pharmacist, 80% of our skills are transferable and the other 20% can be learned and adapted for new roles. Today, it is now very common to have jobs in more than one area of pharmacy, either working part time in different places or moving through different sectors as your career develops. As new and more clinical roles evolve we are moving away from working in silos and in defined pharmacy sectors, and towards a more generic approach. We are all pharmacists first and foremost delivering patient care wherever we work.



# What next?

## 1. Choose the right subjects.

Although you should check precise entry requirements with individual universities you will normally need to have studied sciences (especially chemistry and biology) and mathematics or physics.

## 2. Speak to the careers advisor or careers teacher at your school or college.

They will be able to discuss your interest in pharmacy and will be able to tell you more about the application process.

## 3. Look at the websites of the schools of pharmacy.

(See [rpharms.com/careers](http://rpharms.com/careers) for a list) as they will give you a flavour of what entry requirements you will need to join a Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) course and what it's like to study at each of the different universities.

## 4. Work experience.

Contact your local pharmacy,

primary care organisation or hospital pharmacy to see if they will let you experience pharmacy in action. This could take the form of work shadowing, for example.

## 5. Get more advice.

You could also try writing to the pharmaceutical companies for help and advice – get a list from the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry ([www.abpi.org.uk](http://www.abpi.org.uk)).

## 6. Visit the NHS Careers website.

[www.healthcareers.nhs.uk](http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk) contains many useful fact sheets about what it's like to be a pharmacist. In Scotland, the NHS Scotland careers website ([www.jobs.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.jobs.scot.nhs.uk)).

## 7. See what student life is like.

Take a look at the website of the British Pharmaceutical Students' Association ([www.bpsa.co.uk](http://www.bpsa.co.uk)) as well as some of the university websites. Will student life suit you?



# We are pharmacy

We are the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, the professional leadership body for pharmacists and pharmacy.

Our mission is to put pharmacy at the forefront of healthcare.

Our vision is to become the world leader in the safe and effective use of medicines.

Since the RPS was founded in 1841 we have championed the profession, and are internationally renowned as publishers of medicines information.

We promote pharmacy in the media and government, lead the way in medicines information, and support pharmacists in their education and development.

Because together, we are pharmacy.


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#WeArePharmacy

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